

Grand Canyon National Park Draft Wilderness Management Plan

Executive Summary

I. Introduction

Background

The Grand Canyon National Park Enlargement Act of 1975 required the National Park Service to prepare a wilderness recommendation for the Park. In 1980, the NPS submitted a wilderness proposal recommending 980,088 acres for immediate designation, and 131,814 acres proposed for potential wilderness designation. Since that time, acquisition of grazing, mineral, and other leases, and completion of land-use studies necessitated a revision of the recommendation. In 1993, the NPS updated the wilderness recommendation to reflect these changes and is consistent with the letter or intent of the 1980 wilderness recommendation. The *1993 Final Wilderness Recommendation* consists of two units totaling 1,139,077 acres or 94% of the Park's total area. Of this total, 1,109,257 acres are proposed for immediate designation, and 29,820 acres are proposed for designation as potential wilderness.

NPS Management Policies require that proposed wilderness study areas be managed as designated wilderness, and that no actions be taken that would diminish wilderness suitability until the legislative process for designation has been completed. The Park's General Management Plan treats all proposed areas as wilderness, and specified the development of a Wilderness Management Plan.

In 1995, the Director of the National Park Service issued a special directive addressing wilderness management in National Parks (Special Directive 95-2, Management and Planning Policy for Suitable, Proposed, Recommended and Potential Wilderness). This policy states that in addition to managing classified areas as wilderness, "planning for these areas must ensure the preservation of their wilderness character until Congress determines their eventual designation." The special directive also states that wilderness policy must be reflected in general management plans and all activity plans for wilderness areas. In addition, the Park's 1997 Resource Management Plan specifically directs that the 1988 Backcountry Management Plan be revised to be consistent with NPS wilderness policy requirements.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Wilderness Management Plan is to guide the management of resources and visitor use in the proposed wilderness areas of Grand Canyon National Park. The primary need for the plan is to address wilderness and backcountry issues in context of the Wilderness Act; Grand Canyon's enabling legislation, *NPS Management Policies*, and the General Management Plan.

Scope of the Plan

The Wilderness Management Plan addresses issues and provides guidelines for managing those areas defined as proposed wilderness. The proposed wilderness consists primarily of inner canyon and rim areas, it does not include the developed areas or the Cross-Canyon Corridor. The Colorado River is proposed as potential wilderness and issues specific to river management will be addressed in the Colorado River Management Plan. Visitor use issues that specifically pertain to the Cross-Canyon Corridor and Colorado River are not within the purview of this Wilderness Management Plan.

Goals and Objectives of the Wilderness Management Plan

The Wilderness Management Plan is intended to serve the following goals:

1. Provide guidance and describe strategies for meeting legislative and policy mandates while providing recreational opportunities consistent with wilderness, for a broad range of visitor experiences and settings, and preserving and protecting the natural, cultural, and social resources of Grand Canyon National Park.
2. Provide for the continuity of wilderness management throughout changes of park administration and staff.

The objectives of the Wilderness Management Plan describe desired conditions to be achieved. This includes enhanced customer service through an improved permit system and education program, and improved resource protection and preservation through monitoring, restoration, and research programs. Specifically, the Wilderness Management Plan management objectives are:

1. Establish and implement a permit system that
 - serves the visitor by providing the opportunity to obtain permits for wilderness and nonwilderness areas that yield the type of experience they seek
 - serves Park management by providing an effective way to educate the public on low-impact practices, ethics, and safety
 - serves Park management by providing data on hiker use levels and distribution in order to make informed decisions regarding the management and protection of backcountry and wilderness resources.
2. Establish indicators and standards for desired visitor experiences, and biophysical and cultural resources; monitor regularly the condition of these indicators; and take management action as necessary to meet these standards.
3. Provide access consistent with wilderness values, including protection of natural and cultural resources. Preserve the character of individual trails, and establish minimal standards for primitive roads.
4. Establish a coordinated interpretive/educational program to provide hikers adequate information to plan and execute an enjoyable and safe expedition, whether hiking for a day or for an extended period, and to conduct themselves in a manner which is not damaging to wilderness resources and values.

5. Provide, through partnerships with adjacent land-managing agencies, information on wilderness and nonwilderness recreational opportunities on adjacent lands, including National Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, State, and Tribal lands.
6. Provide a reasonable level of public safety, consistent with wilderness areas in accordance with *NPS Management Policies* and Park guidelines.
7. Encourage research which adds to an understanding of the Park and contributes to the body of knowledge required for effective management and protection of wilderness resources and values.
8. Develop, through partnerships with adjacent land-management agencies, conservation organizations, and institutes of higher learning, an interagency ecosystem-management strategy. The strategy will emphasize restoration and maintenance of natural processes and viable populations of all native species in natural patterns of abundance and distribution.

II. Proposed Action

Implement the Grand Canyon National Park Wilderness Management Plan. This Plan provides guidance for meeting legislative and policy mandates on wilderness management while providing recreational opportunities consistent with wilderness. It provides for implementation of goals and objectives specified in Grand Canyon National Park's 1995 General Management Plan and the 1997 Resource Management Plan. The proposed action provides means of protecting and restoring wilderness suitability for lands identified in the Final Wilderness Recommendation.

The Wilderness Management Plan provides for a sequence of management actions necessary for effective and consistent wilderness management, including recreational opportunities for a broad range of visitor experiences and settings, while preserving and protecting the natural, cultural, and social resources of Grand Canyon National Park wilderness.

Visitor Use and Education

The Wilderness Management Plan prescribes the following actions:

- establish a coordinated interpretive/educational program which provides relevant, pre-trip information and focuses on wilderness values, personal safety, and resource protection,
- establish a coordinated, interagency wilderness educational program for Park staff including 1) wilderness management principles and philosophy; 2) Leave No Trace training; 3) application of the minimum requirement concept; 4) development of proficiency in the use of primitive tools; 5) development of minimum-impact trail maintenance techniques and fire suppression tactics; 6) development of wilderness safety practices,
- provide, through partnerships with adjacent land-managing agencies, information on wilderness and nonwilderness recreational opportunities on adjacent lands, including National Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, State, and Tribal lands.

Restoration and Rehabilitation of Impacted Areas

The Wilderness Management Plan calls for the development and implementation of action plans that:

- establish designated campsites and rehabilitate impacted areas in the Deer Creek, Cape Final, Point Sublime, Fire Point, Swamp Point, and Pasture Wash Use Areas,
- rehabilitate campsites and trails in the Horseshoe Mesa, Hermit Creek, Monument Creek, and Upper Tapeats Use Areas,
- restore to a natural condition two primitive roads north of New Water Springs on the Hook
- relocate 1.4 miles of trail across the Basin and restore to natural conditions the Basin section of the old W-1 primitive road,
- rehabilitate rim access trails including: Tanner, New Hance, South Bass, South Canyon, and Nankoweap,
- restore to a natural condition approximately 40 miles of primitive roads on the Kanab Plateau,
- restore to a natural condition the Tuweep landfill and its one-mile access road,
- restore to a natural condition the two-mile Vulcan Spur Road,
- restore the Huitzal spur road at Pasture Wash.

Access to Wilderness and Nonwilderness Areas

This Plan retains ten primitive roads to provide mechanized access to wilderness trailheads and scenic vistas, as specified in the Final Wilderness Recommendation. It also establishes minimal standards for primitive road maintenance. This Plan also establishes the Semi-Primitive Mechanized Opportunity Class to describe conditions and standards for nonwilderness primitive road corridors.

The Plan provides for stock use on six rim wilderness trails and one (Whitmore) inner canyon wilderness trail. The management of the Bright Angel, North Kaibab and South Kaibab Trails is addressed in the 1988 Backcountry Management Plan. That document remains the primary management plan for the Cross-Canyon Corridor until replaced with an updated plan.

This Plan defines criteria for preserving the character of 63 individual trails. It also provides for the conversion of approximately 80 miles of primitive roads to trails for recreational and administrative use. Proposed actions include development and implementation of action plans that establish trails on former road alignments:

- the nine-mile Brady Hollow Trail on Tuckup Point,
- seven (approximately 40 miles) former North Rim fire roads, including Tiyo Point, Widforss, Komo Point, Francois Matthes, Walhalla Glades, Walhalla Spur, and most of the W-1 (the Basin) fire roads,
- the “Cove Trail” on the old, ten-mile road from the Tuweep Road to the Cove area,
- a one-mile section from the Park boundary to “Fort Garrett,” an obscure historic foundation on the Sanup Plateau,
- a one-mile section from the Park boundary to Fire Point,

- a 9.6-mile trail on the old road alignment from Desert View to Cape Solitude,
- the 10-mile Kanab Plateau Trail connecting Kanab Point with the 150 Mile Canyon Road.

Cultural Resources Management

The Wilderness Management Plan calls for the development of management strategies to accomplish the following actions:

- determine eligibility for National Register of Historic Places for the Santa Maria Springs shelter, Signal Hill Firetower, Kanabownits Cabin, and the Kanabownits Firetower. Upon completion of this process, a course of action will be determined
- implementation of archeological surveys and monitoring along popular trails and campsites in the Grandview Complex, Hermit-Monument Complex, Thunder River-Deer Creek Use Areas
- development and implementation of a site data recovery plan for archeological sites located in the Hermit Creek, Monument Creek, Horseshoe Mesa, Cottonwood Creek, Clear Creek, Cremation, and Tanner Use Areas,
- restoration of historic trails in Hermit, Grandview, and Thunder River-Deer Creek Complexes.

Research and Partnership Programs

This Plan encourages research to increase understanding of Park environments and to contribute to the body of knowledge required for effective management and protection of wilderness resources and values. In addition, this Plan establishes partnerships with institutes of higher learning, conservation organizations, and adjacent land managing agencies to accomplish Park goals related to ecosystem management. Proposed actions include:

- expand the Park's research program to obtain accurate information about the Grand Canyon's resources, ecological processes and human influences,
- evaluate the tools and methods of scientific study for their impacts on wilderness character. Take reasonable efforts to minimize impacts while maximizing the benefit of scientific investigations by applying the minimum requirement decision process,
- develop methods for determining suitability of the Colorado River and its tributaries for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System,
- develop an interagency ecosystem-management strategy. The strategy will emphasize restoration and maintenance of natural processes, and viable populations of all native species in natural patterns of abundance and distribution,
- information on wilderness and nonwilderness recreational opportunities on adjacent lands, including National Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, State, and Tribal lands.

Administration

The Wilderness Management Plan serves Park management by providing:

- continuity of wilderness management throughout changes of park administration and staff,
- specific direction for revising other Park management plans consistent with the wilderness management requirements,
- effective ways to educate the public on low-impact practices, ethics, and safety,

- data on hiker use levels and distribution in order to make informed decisions regarding the management and protection of backcountry and wilderness resources,
- recommended Park staffing levels needed to ensure that wilderness management responsibilities are being met in accordance with the NPS Wilderness Management Guidelines.

This Plan directly addresses the “minimum requirement concept” for administrative use in Grand Canyon National Park. The minimum requirement consists of the minimum tool or administrative practice necessary to successfully and safely accomplish management objectives with the least adverse impact on wilderness character and resources.

III. Public Involvement

In June 1995, the Park conducted a public scoping to identify issues related to current management of backcountry wilderness areas. Comments and suggested solutions are addressed in the Plan.

The Wilderness Management Plan will be released as a *Draft* with an Environmental Assessment (EA) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The EA evaluates the Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives. The Public Comment period on the Plan ends July 15, 1998.

The *Draft* Wilderness Management Plan, Executive Summary, and Environmental Assessment are also available on the Web at: <http://www.nps.gov/grca/wilderness>.

Comments will be accepted by mail at:

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